Don't Let AI Do Your Research

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Artificial Intelligence, popularly known as AI, is everywhere these days. Where it should *not* be is in your philatelic research or writing.

If you search online for "AI for philatelists," you will find numerous websites and blogs dedicated to using AI to identify your stamps, value and grade them, provide rarity rankings, assist with expertization, detect fraud, support AI-assisted postal history research, and more. For those who don't use computers or may not know, blog is short for weblog, where content is updated regularly, and readers can comment and share.

I evolved philatelically in an era where words in auction catalogs and other publications were kept to a minimum to save on printing costs. Thus, an older stamp auction description might have been "10¢ blue (11), OG, NH, VF" to indicate what online today we might write as "CSA 11,10¢ blue Jefferson Davis, Archer & Daly type I, original gum, never hinged, Very Fine." I still use common abbreviations on retail stock pages to save space. More than once at a show, I've had a newer collector ask what a specific abbreviation means, and almost invariably a philatelic veteran sitting nearby will answer correctly before I can.

What causes me to write this cautionary tale is a July 2026 listing on eBay. Uncharacteristically, the description was a whopping 768 words, an overload for even today's more verbose online descriptions where paper, ink, and mailing costs are not an issue. The description excess alone was an immediate red flag.

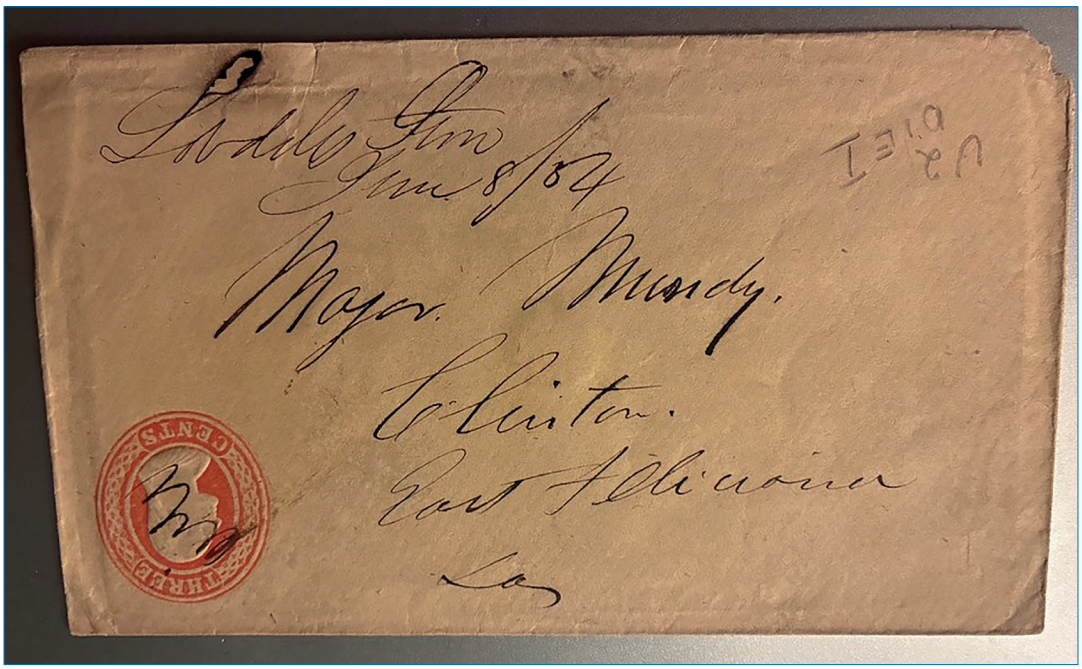


Figure 1. Scott US U2 entire with manuscript postmark of "Lobdell's Store / June 8/54," inaccurately described on eBay as an 1864 Confederate adversity use from the fictitious location of "Liddell Gin."

Figure 1 is the seller-provided image of the eBay offering in question.

The item description was headed:

1864 June 8: Sc#U2 INVALID USE IN CONFEDERATE, East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana

The bidding was set at $525 minimum. The vendor has been selling on eBay since March 1999 with a stated 1.6K items sold.

I will break down sections of the lengthy description with my comments following each section, emphasis and wording as provided in the description. The introductory paragraph began:

> Liddell Gin, East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana — June 8, 1864. Confederate-period manuscript postmark on a U.S. 3¢ Nesbitt postal stationery envelope (Scott U2), whose indicium had been invalid in the Confederacy since June 1, 1861. The envelope was repurposed as adversity stationery during the severe wartime paper shortage. Addressed to Major Mundy at Clinton, this cover represents a non-contract, manuscript-only postal point not listed in Louisiana post office records, with no other examples recorded. The combination of a CSA-period Louisiana manuscript town, unlisted postal locality, and use of demonetized U.S. stationery makes this a notable rarity among Confederate Louisiana postal artifacts.

Admittedly, the handwriting is dreadful and difficult to decipher, but what was immediately evident to me was that the seller (actually, AI writing for the seller) had misidentified the town from which this was sent. I thought perhaps the second word in the postmark was the state, as most often seen.

After scanning the 1862 *List of Post Offices in the United States,* I thought the town might be Loddy, Tenn, although I was dubious because there seemed to be too many letters when compared to the writing. That compelled me to email Jerry Palazolo, a Tennessee expert, colleague, and fellow editor of the *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History* (CSA Catalog).

When Jerry replied, he was at work without access to his library, but he immediately recognized the location from memory as "Lob(d)ells Plantation, La." Jerry explained that this plantation was north of Baton Rouge near Port Allen. He felt the use was likely 1854, with which I totally agree. As is often the case when mailed within the same state, the state name is understood and not always included in a manuscript postmark.

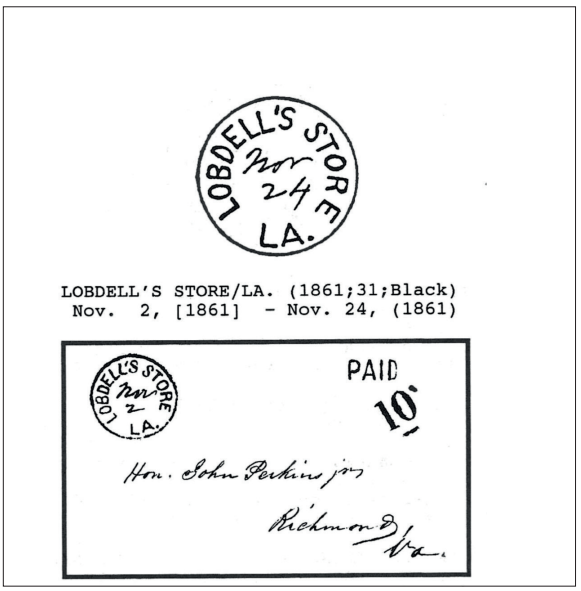


Figure 2. "LOBDELL'S STORE/LA." 31 mm circular datestamp and cover listing tracings as listed in Confederate Post Offices, Postmasters and Postmarks of the Trans-Mississippi States.

Jerry's identification led me to *Confederate Post Offices, Postmasters and Postmarks of the Trans-Mississippi States* by Warren H. Sanders and Erin R. Gunter. Jerry wrote the publisher's foreword for their book, which, as the title indicates, is a compilation of the Trans-Mississippi States postmasters and postmarks.

Figure 2 shows the 31mm handstamped postmark used briefly in the Confederate period from November 2 to November 24, 1861. It appears on page 56 of the aforementioned book by Sanders and Gunter, as well as being listed as type B in the CSA Catalog. A Lobdell's Store PAID 5 is listed in the CSA Catalog as type A. There is no recorded Confederate manuscript postmark.

If this was actually an adversity use of demonetized US postal stationery in 1864, late in the war as asserted in the eBay description, where was the Confederate rate and evidence of payment, such as a stamp or a paid marking?

This is far more likely to have been used a decade earlier, in 1854, as exactly what it appears to be: a Scott U2 3¢ red Nesbitt entire used from Lobdell's Store (La). U2 was issued in 1853; a used entire catalogs $40 in the 2026 *Scott Specialized Catalogue*.

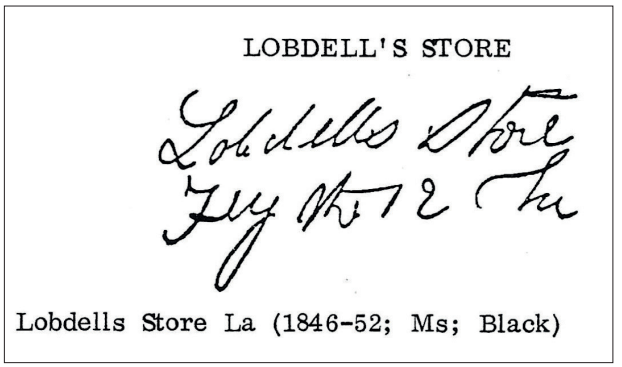


Figure 3. Lobdell's Store, La., antebellum manuscript postmark (1846-52) listing from the unpublished notes of Warren H. Sanders and Erin R. Gunter, courtesy of Jerry S. Palazolo.

Figure 3 is a prewar listing of a Lobdell's Store manuscript postmark for the years 1846-52. It is from the unpublished notes of Warren Sanders and Erin Gunter, as shared by Jerry Palazolo, who counted them as mentors and dear friends. Doubtless, they would have extended the listing date to 1854 because of this cover.

The alleged eBay Confederate scenario as an 1864 adversity cover makes no sense. AI inflated *"Liddell Gin"* to a *"notable rarity"* from an *"…Unlisted postal locality…No other examples recorded."*

Really? I agree that it is unlisted, because no such post office existed except in the "mind" of AI.

1. Biographical Sidebar — Major William H. Mundy (Clinton, Louisiana)

Major William H. Mundy served as a **Confederate militia officer and enrolling officer in East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana**, during the Civil War. Based in **Clinton**, the parish seat, Mundy oversaw **local conscription**, home-guard organization, and enforcement of Confederate manpower laws. His name appears in **Louisiana militia rolls, parish wartime administrative records**, and **Confederate conscription correspondence** preserved in National Archives RG 109. Mundy was not a field-grade officer in a frontline Confederate army; instead, he held a **parish-level military and administrative post**, a role critical to maintaining Confederate authority in the Florida Parishes during 1863–1865. His position made him a central figure in local wartime governance, and mail addressed to him is strongly associated with **Confederate internal administration**.

2. Footnote-Style Citation (Exhibit-Ready)

Major William H. Mundy served as a Confederate militia major and enrolling officer for East Feliciana Parish, appearing in Louisiana militia rolls and conscription records (National Archives, RG 109: Confederate Enrolling Officers' Correspondence; East Feliciana Parish Wartime Administrative *Files, 1862–1865).*

3. Provenance Paragraph — Context for Your Cover

This cover was sent to **Major William H. Mundy**, the Confederate enrolling officer at Clinton, during the late-war period when East Feliciana Parish remained under Confederate administrative control. The use of a **demonetized U.S. 3¢ Nesbitt envelope (Scott U2)** on **June 8, 1864** reflects the widespread **adversity reuse of pre-war stationery** in Confederate Louisiana, where paper shortages were acute and U.S. indicia had been invalid since 1861. The manuscript origin **"Liddell Gin"** represents a **non-contract, unlisted postal locality**, adding further rarity. Together, the Confederate-period date, the unlisted manuscript town, and the address to a known Confederate militia officer firmly place this item within the **administrative postal network of Confederate Louisiana**, making it a **notable and scarce artifact** of wartime internal communication.

Talk about the height of hyperbole! This screams AI with utterly outrageous conclusions in the eyes of any thoughtful Civil War postal history researcher. AI is having a dialog with the seller, as easily seen by wording such as *"Context for Your Cover."*

First, the cover is addressed to *"Major Mundy"* in Clinton, East Feliciana (Parish), La. There is no first or middle name. AI has cleverly identified the addressee as Maj. William H. Mundy, who indeed appears to have been in the Louisiana militia working in the enrolling office for the Confederacy. But that doesn't necessarily mean he was the actual addressee. I had difficulty tracking William H. Mundy during the antebellum period.

Correspondents regularly misspelled names. The name Mundy is often seen as Munday and vice versa. A better candidate for the identity of the addressee is Maj. George W. Munday (1817-1898), who was a prominent local landowner and politician who lived in and around Clinton during the Civil War. In 1837, he bought an interest in a newspaper, *The Louisianan*, which was published in Clinton. Although he was commissioned a Major General in the Louisiana Militia before the war, Munday held all offices from private to major general. He was an active politician for decades and held many important offices in the parish over the years. His name is chiseled in stone on the old State Capitol and is on a bronze plaque at the new State Capitol. George W. Munday's gravestone in Old Clinton Cemetery clearly identifies him as *"Major,"* as shown in Figure 4. It is obviously how he was commonly known. The AI candidate, William H. Mundy, doesn't even show up on the browser search bar without serious digging.

The leap that *"the manuscript origin 'Liddell Gin' represents a non-contract, unlisted postal locality, adding further rarity…making it a notable and scarce artifact of wartime internal communication"* is overreaching. It screams AI. A bridge too far – this is humanoid all the way.

Very few people write like this, especially in eBay descriptions, which tend to be more similar to old auction catalog descriptions – just the facts: cover, franking, postal markings, address, photo, and the condition, perhaps with some biographical information or a link thereto.

Ah, but we are not done. On and on goes the description with yet more outlandish claims that speculate on its great rarity and high market value.

Again, note that AI is directly addressing the seller in the following first paragraph with *"based on the image you provided,"* as well as other things such as *"short answer"* (to your question, eBay seller/inquirer) and more.

Here is the clearest, evidence-based identification of your **manuscript town cancel**, the post office history, the **U.S. postal stationery (Scott U2)** details, and **market value**, based on the image you provided and the best available postal-history sources.

1. Manuscript Town Cancel: "Liddell Gin" (Louisiana)

Short answer: *Yes — Liddell Gin was a very small, now-discontinued rural post office in East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana.*

Identity & Location

The manuscript cancel reads:

"Liddell Gin / June 8 / 64"

"Gin" refers to a **cotton gin settlement**, common in rural Louisiana. These tiny communities often had short-lived Civil War–era post offices that used manuscript cancels because they lacked handstamps.

Post Office Status

Using the USPS historian's guidance on how to verify establishment/discontinuance dates — the authoritative source for post office history — the USPS maintains the national record of postmasters and post office dates.

However, no listing for "Liddell Gin" appears in the standard Louisiana post office directories, which strongly indicates:

- It was **never a formally established U.S. Post Office**, **OR**
- It operated **only briefly**, likely **during the Civil War**, and was discontinued before records were standardized.

This is typical of plantation-based manuscript cancels in Louisiana during 1861–1865.

Rarity / Recorded Examples

Because "Liddell Gin" does **not** appear in the official postmaster appointment records (National Archives RG28) and is absent from Louisiana postal history compilations, it falls into the category of:

Unlisted manuscript post offices — usually 1–3 recorded examples.

Based on comparable Louisiana manuscript-town cancels of the 1860s, the expected census is:

- **Likely 1–2 examples recorded**
- **Possibly unique** if no other collectors have reported one

This makes it a **desirable Confederate-era Louisiana manuscript cancel on an unauthorized use of US postal stationery in Confederate Louisiana from an obscure cotton gin which was an important source of revenue.**

FREE SHIPPING BY US PRIORITY MAIL TO USA ADDRESS ONLY. Please contact me if you are an overseas buyer for actual shipping costs.

- **Town cancel:** *Liddell Gin, East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana*
- **Status:** *Discontinued; likely never formally established; Civil War–era manuscript office*
- **Recorded examples:** *Probably 1–2; possibly unique*
- **Stationery:** *Scott U2, 3¢ red on buff*

Seller is an APS member.

Good to know, AI, that the fictitious Liddell Gin refers to a cotton gin settlement, that it was never a formally established US Post Office, and it is not in Louisiana postal history compilations.

Shouldn't you be looking in the Confederate Post Office Department records instead, AI? You are claiming the cover was posted in the South late in the war, so consulting US postal records is great, but the Confederate ones are far more germane. Also, good to know you conclude it is unlisted (I agree), and that there are likely only 1 or 2 examples recorded. How about none? Possibly unique, you say? I don't think so.

Was there a Liddell family in Louisiana involved in the cotton trade? Yes, there was. Llanada Plantation near Harrisonburg, La., was owned and operated by Confederate General St. John Richardson Liddell (1815-1870). Although Liddell was an outspoken proponent of the emancipation of slaves, he used enslaved labor to pick, process, and gin cotton. He was murdered on February 14, 1870, by a neighboring plantation owner, Col. Charles Jones, a former Confederate officer who was later himself killed by Liddell supporters. The Liddell-Jones feud was like the Hatfield-McCoy feud, similar only in that they both were intensely violent and lasted for years.

Another point in the erroneous description is the geography. East Feliciana Parish (where the fictional Liddell Gin is theoretically located) and Catahoula Parish (where the actual Liddell family plantation of Llanada was located) are roughly 110 miles apart.

That's all, folks. You have now seen 768 words of inaccurate, delusional gibberish. The seller was sold a bill of goods by AI, which he passed along to potential buyers as his own without due diligence. Due diligence does not consist of letting AI do your research and passing off the resulting dialog as your own. Fortunately, no one took the bait; it did not sell.

The eBay case cited here is extreme, with problems immediately obvious to experienced postal history researchers. This is by no means the first outrageous description I've seen, just the latest. Untold eBay descriptions and pricing regularly exasperate me.

AI can be helpful. But you need to use it with a huge dose of caution. For years, most of us used *Roget's Thesaurus* to search for another way to say something. While not a direct forerunner of AI, it is a conceptual ancestor. A dictionary is even more so.

Then we have the often frustrating Spell-Check tool, which is not especially helpful when coupled with uncommon philatelic terms. Or even with non-philatelic words or names like "Trish," which often gets erroneously revised to "Trash" when I'm signing a text or an email. Gee, thanks AI.

You should not let AI do your work, whether ultimately accurate or inaccurate, while your brain and philatelic instincts atrophy. Nor do you want your writing to sound like a robot wrote it, do you?

In the words of Sergeant Phil Esterhaus from the 1980s TV police drama *Hill Street Blues*, *"Let's be careful out there."*

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Jerry Palazolo for his assistance in identifying the challenging subject postmark and offering the tracings from the Sanders/Gunter book, as well as their unpublished private notes for use in this article. I also greatly appreciate his reviewing a draft before publication and offering some suggested tweaks.

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Recording New CSA Finds

New Confederate finds are still being documented for future editions of the *CSA Catalog*. In addition to new, unlisted finds, I am seeking quality images to replace old black and white tracings or poor-quality images that were used in earlier catalogs. It is important that new images be quality *300 dpi .tif or .jpg files* if they are to be used in future editions.

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